

Kendrick Park

The Land

Kendrick Park is a 3.3 acre triangular parcel of land, (an “island”) surrounded by three streets – North Pleasant Street on the west, East Pleasant Street on the east and Triangle Street on the north. The park is located about ¼ of a mile north of the central intersection of the Downtown. It is made up of 10 parcels of land which formerly contained a total of 11 houses. These houses have since been either removed and relocated or demolished.

The park as it exists today consists primarily of open, grassy areas surrounded by trees. It currently does not have any pathways or amenities.

The width of the park varies from about 190 feet near its northern end to less than 50 feet at its southern end. It is slightly less than 1/5 of a mile (1010 feet) long.

The topography of the park also varies. The southern 1/3 of the park is relatively flat and low-lying. Tan Brook crosses the park in an underground culvert in this area. In the vicinity of McClellan Street, right above the Tan Brook crossing, there is a low point with an elevation of about 284 feet above mean sea level.

The highest point in the park is a gentle mound at the northern end, near the Triangle Street intersection. At the top of the mound the elevation is about 290.8 feet above mean sea level. Overall, there is a rise of about 7 feet from one end of the park to the other.

Surroundings

Kendrick Park is located at the north end of the Downtown and is partially surrounded by downtown uses. It serves as the northern entrance to Downtown. The park is bordered on the west by North Pleasant Street and a row of predominantly multi-family commercial residential rental buildings. Beyond that row to the west is a densely-settled historic residential neighborhood, with single and multi-family homes. On the east there is a busy shopping and business area, consisting of retail stores, banks, restaurants and offices. The northern tip of the park is the site of a busy four-way intersection that forms the connection between Downtown Amherst and the University of Massachusetts. Immediately north of the intersection there are several small residences and a motel. The southern edge of the UMass campus is within three blocks—easy walking distance—of the park. Downtown Amherst wraps around the southern and eastern edge of the park.

History

The area of Kendrick Park was originally a residential area north of the downtown center which transitioned into farmland to the north and west. The formation of the Mount Pleasant Institute in 1827 flanked the area between two destinations—the downtown and the new educational institution. But it was not until the coming of the railroad in 1853 and the rapid period of growth and expansion in the 1860s-80s accompanying the Civil War that downtown commercial activity and new downtown-edge residential neighborhoods grew north to embrace this area. What is now North Pleasant Street was cut

west of the park area in 1860 and labored under various names, including “West North Pleasant Street”, “Pleasant Street”, and “Sunderland Street” until finally becoming North Pleasant Street in 1938.

The idea for the park was born in the early part of the last century. In 1930, George Smith Kendrick, President of the Amherst Savings Bank, made a bequest to a trust to purchase a triangular, multi-parceled piece of land in the town center and to build a public park, to be donated to the Town of Amherst. Mr. Kendrick, former president of the Amherst Savings Bank, first envisioned the park in about 1925 when he was 80 years old. He was offended by an ill-kept tenement building at the southern end of the park near the homes of several of his banking colleagues, and was determined to make the land an asset to the town rather than a liability.

Mr. Kendrick and his youngest sister, Jenny, both of whom were childless, agreed to leave the bulk of their wealth in a trust to finance the purchase of the park land. The trust was to purchase the individual parcels within the “island” when they came up for sale and when acquisition was complete the land would be donated to the Town for the purpose of becoming a park.

The last house was recently removed from the site and the Town of Amherst has taken possession of the park land.

Drainage

Tan Brook (formerly known as Wolfpit Brook) runs through a culvert under the park. Tan Brook received its name from the tanners who had set up their establishments along the Brook, in the vicinity of the property in the mid-1800’s. General Benjamin Lincoln, leader of the Massachusetts militia that put down Shays Rebellion, stayed an evening at a home at the north end of the park on his way back to Springfield from having defeated and captured the rebels at Petersham.

As of 1910 the Tan Brook had been placed underground in a stone tunnel that ran from McClellan Street to the east side of East Pleasant Street. The stone tunnel was replaced with a metal culvert in the latter half of the 20th century. [Jason could tell you when.]

The watershed for Tan Brook is large. Its northernmost extent begins in a wetland saddle between Clark Hill and Wildwood Cemetery and includes “Blackbird Island”, the swampy area around the High School and Middle School.

Trees

The park is dotted with mature trees in various stages of health and decline. The predominant pattern of the trees on site is that they reflect the street edge and former residential uses of the area and so are aligned in rows along the outer edges of the park and the property lines of the former house parcels. This pattern tends to create a series of outdoor ‘rooms’, separated from one another by rows of trees. The locations, species and condition of the trees have been mapped. Most trees are shown to be in good condition. The trees species vary from the native Maple, Ash, Oak, Pine and Hemlock, among others, to exotics such as Norway Spruce, Katsura, Norway Maple and Gingko, among others.

Sources:

Site visits – May 23, 2008 and June 19, 2008

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